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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT AND  
MRS. JOHN F. KENNEDY  
AT PRESENTATION OF THE FLAG OF THE  
2506TH CUBAN INVASION BRIGADE  
ORANGE BOWL, MIAMI, FLORIDA

THE PRESIDENT: Commander, Doctor: I want to express my great appreciation to the Brigade for making the United States the custodian of this flag. I can assure you that this flag will be returned to this Brigade in a free Havana.

I wonder if Senor Miranda, who preserved this flag through the last 20 months, would come forward so we can meet him.

I wanted to know who I should give it back to.

I always had the impression -- I hope the members of the Brigade will sit down again -- I always had the impression that the Brigade was made up of mostly young men, but standing over there is a Cuban patriot 57, one 59, one 61. I wonder if those three could stand so that the people of the United States could realize that they represent the spirit of the Cuban revolution in its best sense.

All of you members of the Brigade, and members of their families, are following an historic road, one which has been followed by other Cubans in other days, and, indeed, by other patriots of our Hemisphere in other years -- Juarez, San Martin, Bolivar, O'Higgins -- all of whom fought for liberty, many of whom were defeated, many of whom went in exile, and all of whom came home.

Seventy years ago Jose Martin, the guiding spirit of the first Cuban struggle for independence, lived on these shores. At that time in 1889, the first International American Conference was held, and Cuba was not present. Then, as now, Cuba was the only state in the Hemisphere still controlled by a foreign monarch. Then, as now, Cuba was excluded from the society of free nations. And then, as now, brave men in Florida and New York dedicated their lives and their energies to the freedom of their homeland.

The Brigade comes from behind prison walls, but you leave behind you more than six million of your fellow countrymen who are also in a very real sense in prison, for Cuba is today, as Martin described it many years ago, as beautiful as Greece, and stretched out in chains, a prison, moated by water.

On behalf of my Government and my country, I welcome you to the United States. I bring you my Nation's respect for your courage and for your cause. Our primary gratitude for your liberation must go to the heroic efforts of the Cuban families Committee, Mr. Sanchez and others, and their able and skilled negotiator, Mr. James Donovan, and those many private American citizens who gave so richly of their time.

may imprison bodies, but they do not imprison spirits; that they may destroy the exercise of liberty, but they cannot eliminate the determination to be free. And by helping to free you, the United States has been given the opportunity to demonstrate once again that all men who fight for freedom are our brothers, and shall be until your country and others are free.

The Cuban people were promised by the revolution political liberty, social justice, intellectual freedom, land for the campesinos, and an end to economic exploitation. They have received a police state, the elimination of the dignity of land ownership, the destruction of free speech and of free press, and the complete subjugation of individual human welfare to the service of the state and of foreign states.

Under the Alianza para el Progreso, we support for Cuba and for all the countries of this Hemisphere the right of free elections and the free exercise of basic human freedoms. We support land reform and the right of every campesino to own the land he tills. We support the effort of every free nation to pursue programs of economic progress. We support the right of every free people to freely transform the economic and political institutions of society so that they may serve the welfare of all.

These are the principles of the Alianza para el Progreso. They are the principles we support for Cuba. These are the principles for which men have died and fought, and they are the principles for which you fought and for which some died in your Brigade. And I believe these are the principles of the great majority of the Cuban people today, and I am confident that all over the island of Cuba, in the Government, itself, in the Army, and in the militia, there are many who hold to this freedom faith, who have viewed with dismay the destruction of freedom on their island and who are determined to restore that freedom so that the Cuban people may once more govern themselves.

I know that exile is a different life for any free man. But I am confident that you recognize that you hold a position of responsibility to the day when Cuba is once again free. To this end, it is important that you submerge monetary differences in a common united front; that the Brigade, those who serve in the Brigade, will work together to keep alive the spirit of the Brigade so that some day the people of Cuba will have a free chance to make a free choice. So I think it incumbent upon all of you who are here today to work together, to submerge those differences which now may disturb you, to the united end that Cuba is free, and then make a free choice as to what kind of a government and what kind of a country you freely wish to build.

The Brigade is the point of the spear, the arrow's head. I hope they and the members of their families will take every opportunity to educate your children, yourselves, in the many skills and disciplines which will be necessary when Cuba is once more free.

Finally, I can offer no better advice than that given by Jose Martin to his fellow exiles in 1895 when the hour of Cuban independence was then at hand. "Let the tenor of our words be," Martin said, "especially in public matters, not the heat

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Their efforts had a significance beyond the important desire to salvage individual human beings. For your small Brigade is a tangible reaffirmation that the human desire for freedom and independence is essentially unconquerable. Your conduct and valor are proof that although Castro and his fellow dictators may rule nations, they do not rule people; that they

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Finally, I can offer no better advice than that given by Jose Martin to his fellow exiles in 1895 when the hour of Cuban independence was then at hand. "Let the tenor of our words be," Martin said, "especially in public matters, not the useless clamor of fear's vengeance which does not enter our hearts, but the honest weariness of an oppressed people who hope through their emancipation from a government convicted of uselessness and malevolence for a government of their own, which is capable and worthy. Let them see in us," Martin said, "constructive Americans and not empty bitterness."

Gentlemen of the Brigade, I need not tell you how happy I am to welcome you here to the United States, and what a profound impression your conduct during some of the most difficult days and months that any free people have experienced -- what

a profound impression your conduct made upon not only the people of this country, but all the people of this Hemisphere. Even in prison you served in the strongest possible way the cause of freedom, as you do today.

I can assure you that it is the strongest wish of the people of this country, as well as the people of this Hemisphere, that Cuba shall one day be free again, and when it is, this Brigade will deserve to march at the head of the free column.

MRS. JOHN F. KENNEDY: It is an honor for me to be today with a group of the bravest men in the world, and to share in the joy that is felt by their families who, for so long, lived hoping, praying, and waiting.

I feel proud that my son has known the officers. He is still too young to realize what has happened here, but I will make it my business to tell him the story of your courage as he grows up. It is my wish and my hope that some day he may be a man at least half as brave as the members of Brigade 2506. Good luck.

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